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Cc: []

From: CN=Hanady Kader/OU=R10/O=USEPA/C=US

Sent: Wed 8/3/2011 6:29:47 PM

Subject: Alaska Dispatch: Pebble Mine girl: Face of Alaska's biggest environmental and political battle [seeing partnership Alaska Wild Salmon Protection](http://www.alaskadispatch.com/article/pebble-mine-girl-alaskas-most-unlikely-celebrity)

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The 'Pebble Mine girl,' Alaska's most unlikely celebrity
Patti Epler | Aug 02, 2011

Martina Arce might be the best known, least known person in Alaska these days.

The "Pebble girl," as people tend to call her, is all over the place. You can't turn on your TV or surf to a news web site without seeing the perky, dark-haired young woman explaining, in her now characteristically calm and deliberate way, the economic concerns in southwest Alaska and what part the proposed Pebble Mine might play.

She talks just like that, too, even when she's not on camera. In an interview with Alaska Dispatch Tuesday, the 30-year-old single mom talked about her home town of Iliamna, her background and the somewhat uncomfortable position -- smack in the spotlight -- she finds herself in.

But beyond the advertisements, Arce has remained off the radar the past couple years. She's testified at local community hearings in Iliamna where she still visits relatives but otherwise lives a quiet life in Anchorage.

Alaska Dispatch has been seeking an interview with her for weeks. She says she'd been hesitant to call even more attention to herself. But then the anti-Pebble people began airing TV spots recently that focused on her.

"The opposition needs to get attention now," Arce says. "Instead of really going on facts it's kind of

making it personal."

Arce's soft spoken, gently smiling persona belies what's arguably the most heated environmental debate in the state. Even political dustups over offshore oil development in the Arctic haven't reached the level of public relations storms that swirl daily it would seem around Pebble, a copper, gold, molybdenum and silver prospect that could be one of the biggest mines in the world. It also happens to be in the heart of one of the largest salmon fisheries in the world -- Bristol Bay.

The mine owners, a partnership of Britain's Anglo American and Canada's Northern Dynasty, haven't even applied for major permits yet. But the project has generated thousands of TV spots over the past year or so, including a very active-anti Pebble campaign sponsored by Alaska Wild Salmon Protection. The latest blitz focuses on Arce and features other apparently local residents declaring that the Pebble Girl "doesn't speak for me."

Pebble girl says she'll 'always have a connection' to Iliamna

Arce says she grew up in Iliamna but moved away when she was going to be a junior in high school. She spent the next couple years in Santa Ana, Calif., and attended Mount St. Mary's College, getting her degree in business administration with an emphasis in international business and marketing.

But she'd return home in summer as frequently as she could, helping at her grandmother's bed and breakfast. "All my family, my mom, and everybody still lives there," she says. "When something is your home town and all your roots are there you always have a connection there."

She came back for awhile to help her aunt and uncle with their business, Iliamna Development Corp. A few years ago she did a voice-over for a commercial for IDC and worked with Bradley Reid advertising.

"They were impressed," she says, "I had no experience."

But she told the account managers at the company to keep her contact information in case they needed anything else. And more than a year later, in 2009, she heard from them again.

This time it was to see if she'd be interested in speaking in a Pebble commercial. "I asked them what is the substance," Arce says. "I reviewed the script and I really liked it, and in the ways that it was educating people."

And, no, she didn't walk the whole way from Iliamna to Bristol Bay. And did anybody really think she did?

That series of ads showed her hefting a backpack and telling viewers: "I'm on a journey from Pebble to Bristol Bay." The spots were designed to convince people that the mine itself was so far from the fish runs of Bristol Bay that the chance for devastating environmental damage was slim.

But opponents quickly countered with their own spots, essentially ridiculing that contention and pointing out that salmon swim and spawn in the streams that run throughout the area and that contamination of sensitive areas is a very real possibility.

Arce says that long before she was asked to be what has become the face of Pebble Mine she was beginning to educate herself on what having a mine in the middle of her community would mean. While at IDC, she and her relatives visited other projects including the Berkeley pit in Montana, a large open-pit copper mine that has been criticized for its environmental problems.

"That was an example of a mine that went horribly wrong and we asked if they had any advice," Arce says.

The most important advice she got, she says, was from one person who said the community didn't get involved until it was too late. "He said 'our mistake was that while it was happening a lot of us would just get mad about it. My biggest advice is whether you're for it or against it or afraid of it get involved now so you can make informed decisions based on fact.'"

Now, Arce has become a local celebrity. People come up to her on the street or in the store. "They say 'you're the Pebble girl.' I really don't know how to take it sometimes, are they going to throw eggs at me or whatever," she says. "But a lot of people just want to shake my hand or to meet me. In that way it's great."

Don't assume to know where she stands on Pebble Mine

Arce is often with her 2-year-old son, who she is devoted to at the moment. She's a stay-at-home mom and loves it, she says.

"I don't want to miss a minute of toddlerhood," she says.

Still, she's open to do more Pebble spots provided the script is right for her.

Arce, it seems, is not an unequivocal yes vote for the mine, as many people might believe.

"A lot of people assume that," she says.

But Arce says she still hasn't decided whether Pebble Mine is right for her community. She points out that the companies behind the project still haven't submitted a detailed proposal or applied for permits that

would give the public a chance to examine its plans in detail.

"I think it would be a disservice to stop it right now," she says. "But when the time comes and the proposal is actually there, give it a chance and for everyone to make a decision based on facts and not emotion."

Those considerations include not only the track record of the mine operator and the mine's impact on fish and the environment, but what sort of opportunities it will really bring to southwest Alaska.

"Something does need to happen out there for me and my relatives or it will be a ghost town," she says.

But is Pebble the right project at the right time? Arce says she's waiting to see.

"I've never really spoken about where I stand," she says. "But that's where I stand."

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